



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

Breaking Open the Word Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time C



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Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you Lord as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
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Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ Last week Jesus announced his mission.
- ▶ This week he called his apostles.
- ▶ We are still in the early weeks of the liturgical year.
- ▶ The first Sundays of the year stand as witness to the inauguration of his public ministry.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First Reading. Isaiah 6: 1-2, 3-8

- ▶ Just as today's Gospel is a call story so too is the reading from Isaiah.
- ▶ God validates the prophet's mission and calls him into prophetic service.
- ▶ Isaiah responds, "Yes, here I am, send me."
- ▶ Yet Isaiah is nonetheless terrified. No one sees God and lives to tell about it.
- ▶ Not only does Isaiah live, God validates his mission.
- ▶ When smoke appears in Scripture it is a sign of God's presence.
- ▶ God came face to face with Isaiah, commissioned him for unpopular service and validated his ministry.
- ▶ He truly was the Lord's own prophet.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two. Catechist responds with a "brief" story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ Have you ever volunteered for a difficult job?
- ▶ Have you ever said, "yes" to God knowing that what he asked was going to be difficult?
- ▶ What did you learn about God's call?

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 12: 31-13:13

- ▶ Paul chastised some members of his beloved Corinthian community who believed they were already resurrected because of their participation in the sacraments.
- ▶ These elites thought themselves to possess special knowledge—gnosis.
- ▶ Paul challenged their dualistic behavior.
- ▶ Paul insisted that the tradition passed on to them was authentic--they were not to pick and choose what to believe and what to discard.
- ▶ Paul was well aware of his own unworthy roots. He was horrified that he had persecuted the church.
- ▶ Like Isaiah and Peter, Paul was called and commissioned by God. He understood that such a calling required a servant's humility.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ Put yourself in Paul's shoes. Have you ever been in a position of authority in which you necessarily chastised others for inappropriate behavior or for not doing the right thing?
- ▶ What does your experience teach you about Christian living and the role of the Christian community?
- ▶ What does Paul teach you about it?

Gospel: Luke 5: 1-11

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?
- ▶ Jesus calls Peter and prompts Peter to make a huge haul of fish.
- ▶ Jesus validates Peter's future mission of evangelization just as God validates Isaiah's public prophetic ministry. The big catch foreshadows Peter's future mission. His ministry will be as effective as the great haul of fish. How effective? HUGE! Peter was overwhelmed by Jesus' power. He knew there were no fish in those waters.

- ▶ Jesus' miraculous action was a wake-up call to Peter. It was his "ah-ha" moment—the moment of recognition. Just who is this man whom the waters of the sea, the winds of the air and the fish obey? Peter's life would never be the same again. There was no turning back.
- ▶ Luke uses several literary devices to express the inauguration of Jesus' mission and the reality of who Jesus really is. He frequently used Jesus' miracles as a catalyst of conversion, as a means of bringing people to initial faith in him. Luke's Jesus gives Peter a new name signaling Peter's new role and mission. The conferral of a new name in Scripture meant that the person would be given a new direction or life's vocation.
- ▶ Peter, like Paul and Isaiah, expresses his own unworthiness. Luke uses Peter's declaration of unworthiness to foreshadow the future day when Peter would deny Jesus. The bottom line in this Gospel is that success in ministry is rooted in Christ. It is his work—not ours.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example.

- ▶ Have you ever been surprised by what God has accomplished in your life? Have you ever had your own "big haul of fish"?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about Christian discipleship?
- ▶ Describe the first time you were aware of God's amazing power in your life.
- ▶ When did God first call you? If someone were to ask you why God wants you and what he wants of you? What would you say?

Catechist shares first, and then invites participants to respond. (See appendix #3 or example)

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question (@ three minutes)

- ▶ What one thing are you willing to do this week to be a better disciple/prophet in your world? Is there something that needs to change in your life?

Concluding Prayer

Option 1. Celebrate a minor rite—an exorcism or blessing for catechumens: RCIA 90-97

Option 2. Pray the Prayer of Pope Clement

Option 3. Other suitable, but brief prayer. (Perhaps pray the Prayer of St. Francis.)

APPENDIX

#1. First reading: It was time for me to listen to God's call and respond. For several years I knew God was calling me to something different. I had been in my former parish for seventeen years. It was home. I did not want to move. But I knew it was time. I knew that my parish was ready for me to leave and I was ready to go. What would I face if I left? The devil you know is sometimes easier than the one you don't know. I was very slow in making a decision.

While it was not an easy decision to make or an easy transition to make in a new place, God was definitely doing the calling. The first year, as difficult as it was, was a year of grace-as has every year since. As a result of my "yes" to God, I expanded my ministry in remarkable ways. I learned new skills, and honed little used old ones. I forged new relationships, I ventured into new arenas; I grew by leaps and bounds. Even though I did not relish forging into uncharted waters, I learned a new reliance on God. I learned that when God calls I had better listen and respond.

It was one of the best decisions of my life. Yet I almost said "no." How blessed I am for saying "yes"! I learned that if God is the one doing the calling, I have nothing to fear by responding to his call. God walked with me through every difficult transition. God helped me forge every new relationship. When I sincerely put my ministry in his hands, all I had to do was sit back and marvel at what he was doing. God gave me an amazing faith-filled community---a family to call my own. He taught me that I have nothing to fear by putting my trust in him.

#2. Second Reading: Paul teaches us that part of our Christian responsibility is to call one another to accountability. We live in a culture where that is an extremely difficult thing to do. People avoid doing it at all costs, and what is worse, they do not receive it well either.

Paul serves as an example for us today. He chastised his beloved community and then he reminded them that he is no super apostle. He too was a sinner with a questionable past. Yet he apologized for nothing. God called him and used him to preach the Gospel. He is not ashamed to be God's ambassador. The Gospel he preached is true and it is effective. I very often feel as though I have no right to challenge anyone. "Who do I think I am?"

A few years ago I was faced with a decision. Someone close to me was contemplating an action that I simply could not reconcile. The tempter within teased at every opportunity, "Mind your own business." However, I lovingly spoke the truth and the results had long-term positive impact.

Paul teaches us that by ourselves we have no authority, but in God we are given his authority. Paul reminds me that when I see behavior that needs challenging I

have a responsibility to address it. Similarly when my own behavior is less than stellar, I am called to humbly and thankfully accept being chastised. Such is the purpose of the Christian community. Our job is to help one another in God's ongoing work of salvation.

Gospel. I recently had an ah-ha moment in a spiritual direction session with my pastor. I shared how I have had a terrible struggle with doubt and that my prayer life has been very dry for a very long time. God's consolation comes only in fits and starts and only very seldom. Try as I may, I experience very little consolation.

The insight he shared gave me an entirely new sense of purpose and perspective. He reminded me that God has blessed me with a powerful ministry in the parish and in the wider church. He said I could be blessed with every conceivable consolation and my ministry could be falling apart and be as dried up as the Sahara dessert.

The lack of consolation no doubt is due to the reality that God wants me to know in no uncertain terms that it is his work (not mine) that I am to be busied about. Each of us is called. We will be as effective as our willingness to embrace the Paschal Mystery for the sake of the Gospel. Peter was crucified upside down for his efforts. Nothing gets in the way of ministry like self-aggrandizement and pride. God has ways of ridding us of those two detriments to ministry.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Evangelization

Miracles

Salvation/Soteriology

Moral Decision Making

Baptism

Incarnation

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the index of doctrinal topics and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

EVANGELIZATION

Both Isaiah and Peter were called for the purpose of evangelizing the world. Both would have very powerful ministries of evangelization. When God calls us we can always expect God wants us to evangelize others---to share our faith with the world. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the implications of God's call. Each of us is called to evangelize the world. Thus today's extended session will address the doctrinal issue of EVANGELIZATION.

MIRACLES

Luke often used the vehicle of miracles to bring people to initial conversion in Christ. Miracles were the catalyst that opened people's eyes to really encounter the Christ. Peter experienced his own ah-ha moment when Jesus caused the big catch of fish. Peter realized for the first time just who Jesus really was. Today's liturgy invites a reflection on the role of MIRACLES in Christian life--what we believe about them, their intended purpose, etc. Today's doctrinal extended session will focus on what the Church teaches us about MIRACLES.

SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY

Today's liturgy is a proclamation of the saving mission of Christ. Jesus' miraculous call of Peter and the Apostles sets in motion his plan of salvation. Today's story not only proclaims the Christ who has come, but also looks toward the fulfillment of his mission—the future cross and resurrection. The first Apostle will have a significant role in God's plan of salvation. Today's doctrinal extended session will focus on what the Church teaches about SALVATION.

MORAL DECISION MAKING

Paul chastised his beloved community. He called the people to accountability. He

acknowledged his own sinful past but very strongly and courageously stood for truth. He knew the moral thing to do. When God calls us he gives us the tools to make right decisions—moral decisions. The Church teaches us what we need to know in order to make a moral decision. Today's extended doctrinal session will focus on what constitutes a moral action and how we form a moral conscience.

BAPTISM

Today's liturgy is a series of calls. God calls the prophet, the preacher and the first Apostle. They respond and say, "Yes." Baptism is our first call. Through baptism we are called to be priest to serve God's people, prophet to proclaim the word of God in word and deed, and king to lead people to Christ. It is the mission of Isaiah, Paul and Peter in today's liturgy. Today's extended doctrinal session will focus on the sacrament of baptism—the sacrament that continues to invite us to respond to our baptismal call.

INCARNATION

While most often the INCARNATION is a topic for the Christmas season, we are in the early days of the New Year and Christmas is still in our shadow. If it were not addressed during the Christmas season now would be a good time. Jesus' universal message of salvation, his healing, reconciling mission is made possible only because God sent his Son to save the world. Today Peter encounters the Christ—the One prophesied from of old---the Messiah and Lord of the universe. Without the Incarnation today's Gospel would not have taken place. Without the INCARNATION his saving mission would not be possible. Today's doctrinal extended session will focus on the mystery of the INCARNATION of Christ and the implications for our lives today.